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Sugar Cane and Coffee in Puerto Rico

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Sugar Cane and Coffee in Puerto Rico

I

The Rôle of Privilege and Monoply in the Expropriation of the Jibaro

Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen, who survey
The rich man's joys increase the poor's decay,
'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand
Between a splendid and a happy land.[1]

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

By RAYMOND E. CRIST

I

WHEN COLUMBUS DISCOVERED a few tropical islands in the Western Hemisphere instead of a new route to the fabulous riches of the East Indies, he lost favor with the King and Queen of Spain. Ere long, however, the tiny islands of the Western Indies assumed great strategic importance when Cortez and Pizarro sent back to their sovereigns their amazing reports of conquest in the wonder Empires of the *Aztecs* and the *Incas* on the continents beyond. For the constantly warring states of northwestern Europe, also beckoned by glittering visions of gold, began to expand to the further side of the Atlantic. To gain a foothold in the Caribbean—in those days when might frankly made right—was no easy task: the weakness of France, England and Holland was evidenced in the very small crumbs of islands they were able to snatch from the rich Spanish table. These insignificant islands—they were as petty cash to the Spaniards, who controlled the rich mines on "the Main"—were colonized and fortified as outlying possessions of the several mother countries. The history of the Antilles became an accurate reflection, in miniature, of the internecine wars of Europe. On these lovely tropical shores, the greed, the injustices, the dis-

[1] From "A Deserted Village."

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eases and the fierce religious hatreds of Europe were brought to a focus.

So great was the lure of gold and adventure on the continent that the Spaniards actually encountered serious difficulty in maintaining on their islands garrisons of sufficient numbers to defend them against the enemy countries. We need not raise a smug eyebrow at such a manifestation of greed, for if the California of the Gold Rush days had been as accessible to English colonists in the seventeenth century as was Mexico to the West Indian Spaniards in the sixteenth century, the lands of the English colonies on the Atlantic Seaboard might well have been passed over in neglect. Because the Islands Spaniards were blinded by the gold beyond, fertile regions, which, by modern standards, were richly endowed with natural resources, for centuries were not made to produce enough to pay the expenses of government.

The result was that the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico —at times even Venezuela, Florida, and Louisiana—were subsidized from the treasury of New Spain in amounts varying from three to four million dollars a year. Meanwhile, the English, French and Dutch, lacking immediate access to the gold and silver mines, developed divers other techniques for conquering fortune: their buccaneers lay in wait for the great Plate Fleets of the Spaniards and plundered their bulging cargoes; they captured Negroes in Africa and sold them to the Conquisetadores for use on the plantations that were springing up all over the new Spanish possessions. However deplorable, it is a matter of historical record that relatively few sought out the Carribbean Islands—Spanish, English, French or Dutch—inspired by a motive higher than the desire to extract the greatest possible wealth in the shortest possible time. Among the Islands, Puerto Rico fared no better than the rest.

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II

VERY EARLY in the history of Puerto Rico, once it was clear that little gold could be uncovered on the island, the attention of the crown officials was directed to the possibility of deriving wealth from the production of sugar. The Treasurer, Auditor and Commissioner of Puerto Rico, in a communication to the Crown dated June 25, 1529, states that "in order to enrich the island, and to give (industry) a start thereon, four or five sugar mills are necessary, but since this is a costly enterprise the private citizen does not dare to undertake it."[2] The evidence shows that government subvention was not slow to follow.

These islands, which were early known as 'sugar islands', were by nature adapted to any form of tropical agriculture. Yet even in the beginning little diversification of crops was practiced. Because it offered the quickest way to wealth by agriculture, cane growing was the common choice. Sugar was still in Europe a medicament bought by the ounce from the apothecary. Its high value in the European market, and the relative cheapness of its production in the Indies, once the slave trade was efficiently organized, made its cultivation an extremely profitable business.

Many efforts were therefore made to safeguard the sugar plantations. By Royal Cédula, dated January 15, 1529, no sugar plantation, or anything necessary in its operation, including slaves, could be forcibly sold to satisfy debts, unless the King was the debtor. Albeit acts of God were operative then as now, man-made regulations kept the business going. In 1615 all the sugar mills in Puerto Rico were destroyed by hurricane; four new ones were built with government funds in 1620.

In the Spanish Empire the left hand was not always aware

[2] Fco. López Dominguez, "Origen y Desarollo de la Industria Azucarera en Puerto Rico", *Revista de Agricultura de Puerto Rico,* Año X, No. II, p. 49.

of what the right hand was doing. Many sugar plantation owners, wishing to sell their properties and liquidate their debts in order to go to Mexico or Peru, were forbidden to do so by a decision of the Audiencia of January 20, 1534. Yet at the same time, extremely high duties were levied on Puerto Rican sugar in the port of Seville, where all home-coming boats from the New World were required to land. To these high duties were added the tithes of the church, and thus were consumed large quantities of capital which might otherwise have been reinvested in the sugar industry.

With these aids and handicaps, the industry held its own in the two centuries from 1600 to 1800 without much prospect of becoming big or flourishing. Actually, a somewhat larger quantity of sugar was produced on the island of Puerto Rico during the second half of the sixteenth century, than during the second half of the eighteenth century. Taxes and regulations of Church and State would early have sounded the death knell of the industry, if they had been vigorously carried out, but the motto, *se obedece pero no se cumple* (compliance without obedience), was skillfully practised in the colonies. In Puerto Rico contraband commerce with foreigners assumed large proportions. Witness the statement of O'Reilly in his report to the King in 1765: "This illegal commerce, which in other regions of America has occasioned so much damage to the King and to the commerce of Spain, has been very beneficial to Puerto Rico."[3] And the capital derived from this source was no small item in the development of the sugar industry. In the early nineteenth century, during the revolts of Spain's colonies in the New World, in the course of which many Spanish sympathizers escaped to Puerto Rico, French and English planters from neighboring islands and from Louisiana took advantage of the Cédula de Gracias which granted foreigners the privilege

[3] Fco. López Dominguez, *loc. cit.*, p. 55.

of settling in the Spanish Empire. They came to Puerto Rico with their wealth, their slaves, and their experience in tropical agriculture. The influx of capital was especially timely. After the other colonies achieved their independence from Spain, Puerto Rico no longer received from the Viceroyalty of Mexico the money which, for some two centuries, Spain had taken from the richer colony and allocated (*situado*) to the impoverished garrison of Puerto Rico, and which had served to cover the costs of the civil administration of the island.

In 1880, in order to improve the situation of the planters in Puerto Rico, Governor Eulogio Despujol in an official letter to the Ministry of Overseas Affairs made the following recommendation:

> The ports of the United States of America, constituting, by virtue of their proximity, the natural market for the products of the Antilles, should, in our commerical interest and in order to promote and facilitate the entrance of our products, be open (to us) by treaty, and although political interests demand that commercial relations between the peninsula and its provinces be maintained and reenforced, it is convenient, as well as most urgently necessary, that the most valuable products of Puerto Rico, such as sugar, tobacco and coffee, should have steady markets close at hand for their best development.[4]

The order in which the principal crops are listed is significant: because of its long tradition, sugar comes first, although in the previous year, 1879, the value of the coffee exports exceeded that of the sugar exports. And the value of the coffee exports steadily increased until by 1896 it was three times as great as that of sugar.

Sugar production, in spite of all efforts, had steadily declined—from 115,700 tons in 1872 to 64,000 tons in 1897—and for valid economic reasons: during the ten years preceding 1898, the price of sugar in Puerto Rico had fluctuated between 1.7 and 2 cents a pound.

[4] Quoted by Fco. López Dominguez, *loc. cit.* p. 169

III

THE SUGAR INDUSTRY, favored and promoted at its beginning in the sixteenth century, encountered its first serious competition from the modest, undemanding plants of *Coffea arabica* L., introduced into Puerto Rico in 1736. They did not, like cane, require the best alluvial soil; the virgin, clayish soils of the gentle mountain slopes, rich in organic matter, were an ideal edaphic environment. The climate of the trade-wind tropics, tempered by elevation, exactly suited the coffee plant. By 1760 coffee had become a crop of importance for Puerto Rico, and in 1770 the export production was 700,000 pounds. Coffee production was officially encouraged, and methods of cultivation and of processing the berries were studied, with the result that as production increased quality improved. Again an important though short-lived influence was the government: in 1768 a royal decree exempted coffee, for a period of five years, from the payment of duty on entrance into Spain. The stimulus thus given to the coffee producers was so great that for the last thirty years of the eighteenth century export production of coffee averaged almost a million pounds a year. Except for this initial help, the coffee industry was left to develop without government favors. The influx, during the revolutionary wars, of people from the Canary islands, from Santo Domingo, and even from the Mainland of South America, proved a boon to the industry, because many brought with them—particularly from Santo Domingo—a practiced technique in the processing of coffee. An additional factor in the economic and cultural success of the coffee plantation in Puerto Rico was that it was not unduly large; it required much care but relatively little capital.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the production of "high-flavor" coffee for export exceeded 10,000,000 pounds

a year. Puerto Rican coffee was much prized in the European markets, which absorbed almost 60,000,000 pounds in the fiscal year 1895–96, when the total area in that crop was almost 200,000 acres, or over 40 per cent of the total land under cultivation on the island. The industry naturally supported a large percentage of the population of Puerto Rico, although at a relatively low standard of living as will be seen.

Coffee growing was carried on to a large extent by free labor, because the techniques demanded a certain amount of skill, and the relative smallness of the unit made the keeping of slaves unprofitable. Returns were adequate but not exorbitant. The golden age of the coffee planter was the latter part of the nineteenth century, when coffee was the main agricultural export crop and the chief source of income for half the population. As sugar proved less and less able to meet competitive conditions, coffee came forward as the predominant plantation industry, and encroached, as sugar cane had once done—and was soon to do again—upon land otherwise devoted to food crops and stock raising. Coffee planters were the favored ones of Puerto Rico; their credit was good—too good in many cases—for a few poor years meant that their farms were heavily mortgaged. But good years meant high incomes, new homes, new plantings of coffee trees, trips to Europe for the old folks, and perhaps school in Spain for the eldest son. With the coming of American sovereignty in 1898, part of the market for Puerto Rican coffee in Spain was lost, and a devastating hurricane in 1899 spelled ruin for the crop of that year and the three years that followed. Many coffee growers were temporarily reduced to poverty, but the plantations were forthwith replanted, and by 1903 large-scale exportation was resumed.

IV

IN THE FALL of 1898 the Americans took over an island that was, economically, a mixture of mountain-slope subsistence farming and small-scale plantation agriculture, producing coffee, sugar, and tobacco for an almost non-existent domestic market and an indifferent foreign market. In 1899, of 40,000 plantations, 93 per cent were operated by their owners, *i.e.* coffee growers, largely resident, who were overseers of a vast submerged amorphous mass of poorly paid, poorly fed, poorly clad *jíbaros,* suffering from hookworm, malaria, liver flukes and malnutrition.[5] Sugar in Puerto Rico, with no friend at the court of the international moneyed interests, had failed to keep pace with the technical revolution which had transformed the industry in the last quarter of the century, and the Wilson tariff of 1894, which removed a U. S. tariff preference on the sugar of the Spanish colonies, made Puerto Rican sugar growers give up the struggle. To such a low ebb had the sugar industry fallen that, at the time of the American intervention, Mr. O. P. Austin, Chief of the Treasury Bureau of Statistics at Washington, could report from personal observation that in Puerto Rico "the attractiveness of the sugar plantations as investments is reduced by the fact that many plantations have of late been abandoned as such and turned into cattle ranges."[6]

But, after the Occupation, in 1899, Congress authorized an 85 per cent reduction in the tariff on sugar from Puerto Rico, and, as a result, the harvest of that year—some 40,000 tons from 71,778 *cuerdas*[6a]—although small, because the hurricane had destroyed about one-third of the crop, was exceptionally profitable to the producers. Sugar sold for about twice what it had been selling for before, and the planters whiffed a bull market. By 1908 there were already 145,433 *cuerdas* in

[5] Vividly described by Dr. Bailey K. Ashford in "A Soldier in Science."
[6] Frederick A. Ober, "Puerto Rico and Its Resources," New York, 1899, p. 265.
[6a] A *cuerda* is equal to approximately one acre.

cane, with a production for export of 277,000 tons of sugar. The era of sugar prosperity had begun.

The United States tariff is designed to protect such products as are grown or manufactured on the mainland. Consequently, with the change in sovereignty, Puerto Rican growers of tobacco and sugar cane, which are produced in the United States, profited from the American tariff. But coffee was left in the cold; it was not grown on the mainland, and it therefore had to compete in the international market with such large scale producers as Brazil. Local Puerto Rican growers of sugar cane soon had Americans—individuals or corporations—as neighbors in the lucrative sugar business, and these mainland interests were vocal and powerful in Washington; they could fix in advance the price of sugar, irrespective of what the world price might be. The coffee grower had no friends at court; unlike the sugar producer, he never knew what he would get for his crop, the price of which depended on the vagaries of the international market, itself a reflection of a war in Europe, a bumper crop in Brazil, new tariffs here, rumors of war there. Thus Puerto Rican coffee became a stepchild, exposed on the doorstep to the buffets of international competition, whereas sugar, admitted into the mainland family, loudly demanded and immediately received special treatment and special privileges and at once became a spoiled child. Verily, unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

Land values increased rapidly once the island was tied to the continental market and modern methods of commerce and industry were introduced. When the small plantation owner saw the increase in the price of land, he thought it was in his own best interest to sell to representatives of the large landholding companies for what seemed a fantastic price.

The original landholder usually moved to town and became part of the meager middle class; his *peones,* or workers, now bereft of even that scant security commonly found in a patriarchal society, became wage earners, uprooted and landless, at the beck and call of an employer in the struggle for existence —their shadowy birthright sold for a lean mess of pottage. The people were as effectively pushed off the land in this pay-as-you-go process of peaceful penetration as the English peasants had been by the Enclosure Acts, the enforcement of which often meant eviction at the hands of the police. And the results in both cases were the same: the returns benefited only the few, while the many, now landless and displaced, formed a great reservoir of cheap labor. In England, however, some of the landless proletariat gradually emigrated, some were slowly absorbed in the industrial revolution, but in Puerto Rico the process of uprooting the peasantry has been so rapid that chaotic conditions have inevitably resulted, and in consequence adjustments have been painful.

The poet Goldsmith, in "A Deserted Village," depicted the frightful conditions in Ireland where he had lived as a boy during the time when the Irish peasants were being driven from their land because it had been given in great landed estates to English noblemen. The palatial homes of the rich, the fantastic prices of everything, including the food of the poor, the beautiful island where physically 'every aspect pleases,' yet where the people were submerged in poverty and misery, these contrasts were vividly portrayed by the poet as he surveyed the desolate scene in Ireland:

> Thus fares the land by luxury betrayed;
> In nature's simplest charms at first arrayed;—
> But verging to decline, its splendors rise,
> Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;
> While, scourged by famine, from the smiling land
> The mournful peasant leads his humble band;

And while he sinks, without one arm to save,
The country blooms—a garden and a grave!

Jonathan Swift, appalled at the wretchedness and destitution of the Irish, brought to such an estate by English overlords, wrote a pamphlet entitled "A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from being a Burden to their Parents or Country." This tremendous piece of irony, in which the author proposes, as calmly as a modern business man might suggest importing hams from Poland, that the children should be turned into articles of food, is a fearful expression of burning indignation against intolerable wrongs.

Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., when Governor of Puerto Rico, in 1930, stated more succinctly but no less cogently, "The island seethes with misery."

Let us analyze briefly the process whereby during the past half century, conditions in Puerto Rico have gradually approximated in gravity those of Ireland of two centuries ago: the Congress of the United States, moved partly by the current campaign against land speculation at home, on May 1, 1900, passed a resolution to the effect that no corporation could own more than 500 acres in Puerto Rico. But, since the resolution fixed no penalties for those who violated it, it was not respected. By 1930, violators of the 500-acre law—367 out of a total of 58,371 landholders—controlled almost one-third of all farmland, whereas farms of less than 20 acres, comprising 72 per cent of existing farms, occupied only 12.4 per cent of all farmland. The period from 1900 to 1930 was the golden age for the sugar companies, when according to the *Report on the Sugar Industry in Relation to the Social and Economic System of Puerto Rico,* "sugar was everything and everything was sugar."[7] In the course of fifty years the industry has absorbed most of the fertil alluvial land of the

[7] Senate Document No. 1 of the first Session of the Puerto Rican Legislature.

Island; the control of large landholdings could not have been maintained without control of the railroads, which the sugar industry accordingly built; excellent black-top motor roads, the construction costs of which were contributed in the beginning out of insular funds, but increasingly—since the early Thirties—by the general taxpayer of the United States in the form of federal funds, have naturally been of greater use to the modernized sugar industry than to the neglected coffee industry; exports of sugar products to the mainland have paid for the major necessities of life which have been bought in growing quantities in the continental United States; finally, as brought out in the Report just quoted, compiled in 1941, "the estimated sugar-cane wealth of the island is 36 per cent of all taxable wealth. Yet the sugar industry paid (in 1940) only 23 per cent of all revenues of the Government, while all other taxpaying groups, whose taxable wealth was estimated at 64 per cent of the total, contributed 75 per cent of all revenues of the government,"[8] although, according to the same source, slightly more than half of sugar's income over a period of years was derived from tariff benefits.

[8] *Loc. cit.*

II

The Pauperization of the Jibaro—Land Monopoly and Monoculture

V

To THE END of the nineteenth century Puerto Rican coffee was popular, with resultant prosperity in the industry. In the fiscal year 1895–6, Europe purchased a total of 57,961,291 pounds of Puerto Rican coffee, and the following year, the last of the Spanish regime, 51,097,824 pounds were exported to Europe. During the next three turbulent years, control of Puerto Rico passed from Spain to the United States, markets were dislocated, and the island was devastated by the hurricane of San Ciriaco; the result was that during those three years, a total of only 64,072,977 pounds of Puerto Rican coffee was exported. But after the low of 1900 (7,392,977 pounds), the exports of coffee rose again, and for the next fifteen years a ready market took all the coffee which the growers could produce. But even during this period living and working conditions on the coffee plantations were unspeakably bad. The story is told by Dr. Ashford who served in Puerto Rico as Major in the Medical Corps of the U. S. Army:

> Rose (Director, Rockefeller Sanitary Commission) saw the poor mud-stained laborer degraded by his disease and literally submerged in the monotonous routine of coffee culture, living from hand to mouth; his children starving and sick; and his wife, no better off than he, working a bit in the coffee grove and a listless bit more in the bare shack. He saw the exquisite beauty of these tropical mountains with their sheer ravines and their limpid streams. He felt the cool damp of the coffee grove under the feathery shade of the *guava* (guamá?) tree. He talked with the plan-

tation owner and found that only a tithe of his workmen were worth their salt, and that they were held on as laborers—with a wage pitifully low, it is true—because the owner hadn't the heart to turn his half-starved people off, sick as they were. He personally verified their ragged clothes, their lack of shoes, and their docile, animal-like constancy in the work of the *amo,* or master. He talked with the *jíbaro* and found a man who had descended almost if not quite to the level of the beasts, stumbling about by day over the slippery mud of the coffee plantation, sleeping cold and wet at night without bed or bed covering, eating what he could get —a fare limited principally to a mess of rice and beans, with codfish and tubers—and pro-creating, with no thought of the morrow, no thought of the hereafter, no thought of the future of his sons and daughters not even a thought of a freer, better life; only a montonous repetition of to-day, yesterday, and of the other yesterdays before it.[9]

This was in 1908, when the value of the coffee exported was $4,304,600. Peak production was reached in 1915 when 51,125,620 pounds of coffee were exported, to the value of $7,082,791.

Then came World War I; markets were closed and exports declined. The coffee fiesta was over and midnight had struck for the Coffee Cinderella masquerading as a Princess. The truth was not immediately apparent; economic nationalism following the war brought with it a spate of embargoes and quotas, tariffs and trade restrictions, and poor Cinderella, slowly but none the less surely, began to lose her glass slippers and other pieces of finery. And the Prince in this case, in the person of Uncle Sam, did not seek her out to marry her—indeed he did not even try to give her a new dress; he had fallen in love with the Princess of the Blood Royal—Sugar.

Hurricanes have been freely blamed for enormous and irreparable damage to coffee plantations. Yet the facts in the case do not show this to be warranted. In 1866 14,900,000

[9] Autobiography of Bailey K. Ashford, "A Soldier in Science," New York, 1934, p. 97. (Elements in the conditions described by Dr. Ashford are hookworm and poor diet, the first of which has been somewhat ameliorated under the American regime, while during the same period the social ills which are engendered by the great landed estate have become worse rather than better.)

pounds of coffee were exported. The following year the terrible hurricane of San Narciso struck the island. Yet in 1871, the year of the small hurricane of Santa Susana, 20,800,000 pounds were exported. In 1880, four years after the bad hurricane of San Felipe I, 48,000,000 pounds were exported—almost twice the amount exported the year before the disaster in 1875, *viz.*, 26,100,000 pounds.[10] In 1898, 47,900,000 pounds were exported; yet in spite of the disastrous hurricane of San Ciriaco in 1899 and in spite of the highly publicized loss of the foreign market following the American intervention, 38,700,000 pounds were exported in 1907. The conclusion is inescapable that hurricanes *per se* did not destroy the coffee industry in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that hurricanes still occur in Cuba and Jamaica, yet both those islands manage to produce coffee in significant amounts.

Coffee exports dropped from an annual average of 48,500,000 pounds for the period of 1892–1896, to 23,900,000 for the period 1924–1926, and to a mere 2,400,000 for the year 1935–1936. In other words, there was a drop of 50 per cent in production for export for the thirty-year period from 1896 to 1926—but the industry still survived. And the Spanish market was far from being entirely lost in 1898. Exports to Spain for the period of 1892–1896 were 12,000,000 pounds (24.8 per cent of total production), as against 2,700,000 pounds for 1924–1926 (11.4 per cent of total production). In other words the Spanish market was not lost in 1898 *in toto.*

The industry did not immediately collapse. Prices remained high during the period of readjustment following World War I, but Puerto Rico lost some of its most valuable markets in Europe. The Cuban market, too, was lost, when the leaders in that Republic began to sense, with Martí, that

[10] Jorge E. Saldaña, "El Café en Puerto Rico," San Juan, P. R., 1935, p. 6.

"a people commits suicide on the day it trusts to one crop for its subsistence" and Cuba expanded its own production of coffee, with a slight decrease in emphasis on sugar. Indeed, those interested in resuscitative measures for the coffee industry in Puerto Rico might with profit take notes on relatively recent events in the history of Cuba, as recorded by Francisco Pérez de la Riva,[11] where vigorous government measures were undertaken to revive the coffee business: a minimum price was fixed; contraband was ruthlessly stamped out; the government built hullers, constructed warehouses and established experiment stations. The tariff was kept high —$32 the hundred kilos on all coffee except that from Puerto Rico, on which it was fixed by treaty at $22.60; and even these imports were finally curtailed. These energetic measures were so effective that since 1931 Cuba has continued to produce coffee for its own use and to export a substantial amount each year.

Mr. Telford in an excellent article[12] focuses attention on the extent of erosion and soil depletion in the coffee area of Puerto Rico, as a result of techniques that have tended to make coffee raising a typical example of "mining" the soil. The system of clean cultivation he particularly condemns. It is more than probable that proper techniques have not been developed for the reason that there has not been enough profit in the growing of coffee to warrant any change. The margin of profit was too small to permit the accumulation of sufficient capital to make the coffee business permanently profitable. And with the increasing emphasis on, and bounties for, the growing of sugar, the position of the coffee grower became progressively more precarious.

The coffee plantations valiantly battled on. Exports were valued at $9,000,000 for the year 1919–20, but only a little

[11] "El Café: Historia de su Cultivo y explotación en Cuba," La Habana, 1944.

[12] "Saving Puerto Rican Coffee Soil," *Agriculture in the Americas*, Vol. VI, No. 8, pp. 118–21.

more than half that amount for the following year. During the roaring twenties, there were ups and downs—but mainly downs: $2,500,000 for coffee in 1927–1928. The planters had tried to maintain a way of life in which the farm worker had at least enough land to grow crops for his own use. But the vanishing coffee income was a sad reality, and as more and more plantations were sold, the coffee workers had less and less to eat. Hungry bellies relentlessly pushed them off the desolated mountain slopes, and they squatted in miserable primitive shacks on the edges of the cane fields or, still worse, in the frightful slums which mushroomed around the towns. In 1926 the value of the exported coffee crop barely exceeded $7,000,000; yet the cost of living on the island continued to skyrocket as fewer food crops were grown locally and more were bought in the high-price mainland market; life for the landless, often wageless, worker became precarious in the extreme. Under conditions not nearly so bad, the Yankee Farmer in New England finally gave up the struggle, and the French Canadians and other immigrants took over. In spite of floods and hurricanes, droughts and loss of markets, the *jíbaro* somehow continues to be fruitful and to multiply in an environment barely compatible with survival.

Then came the hurricane of 1928—then the hurricane of 1932, adding impetus to the toboggan, and the price of coffee went down and down. The 8,000,000 pounds exported in 1936–37 sold for less than half of what a smaller crop had sold for in 1927–28. The average price of coffee for the fiscal year 1939–40 was less than 12 cents a pound. In 1945 Puerto Rico imported coffee over the tariff of 18 cents a pound. The money for these purchases was provided by the insular government, and the sum collected reverted to the insular treasury, as do the revenues derived from the tax on Puerto Rican rums exported to the United States. The insular government was, of course, charged in some quarters with pam-

pering coffee. There is, apparently, no complaint against pampering as such: it all depends on what crop is pampered, and by whom.

In the company of a personage high in the councils of the island, I was once slowly making my way along a trail in a coffee district which was a veritable quagmire of sticky red mud. When an eminence was reached from which was glimpsed a distant view of the beautiful landscape of the haystack hills to northward and, in the foreground, of the miserable huts of the coffee "hands," we stopped for breath. My companion remarked that he could not see why any of the coffee growers, in view of the small and ever diminishing returns they received for their labors, still tried to grow coffee at all, when they could move to town and apply for relief. My contribution was that by the looks of the San Juan slums —satirically and realistically called respectively "The Pearl" and "The Mudhole"—a great many of them had already adopted that solution to their problems, to which the reply was made: "Yes, but under the circumstances, not nearly so many have left the countryside as might have been expected."

VI

BUT THE SUGAR COMPANIES began to have their troubles too. The uprooted proletariat soon became restive. One observer reports:

> The reduced wage system and the absolute dependence of the wage-earning group has given rise to a great many labor disturbances within the last few years. These labor disturbances have included both city and country groups and have in nearly all cases been caused by an effort to better the working conditions and to secure an increase in wages. In the great majority of the cases there is no doubt but that the laborers were justified in asking for better conditions than those which actually existed.[13]

(Those sentences were written in 1917!) But the land of Puerto Rico was being monopolized, and monopolists do not

[13] Fred K. Fleagle, "Social Problems in Puerto Rico," New York, 1917, pp. 73–74.

always feel constrained to increase wages or to better working conditions. Hurricanes and the wagelessness of the Great Depression did not improve matters, and the people as a whole sought some effective way to stop the growth of the land monopoly. There was still that 500-acre law on the statute books, but it was old and toothless. Teeth were provided by act of the insular legislature in 1936, which made possible *quo warranto* proceedings for the taking over by the insular government of corporation acreages in excess of 500 acres. The sugar companies sensed the danger. They rushed to battle with the cry that it was unconstitutional to enforce a law whose violation had been accepted in practice for so many years. The Puerto Rican Supreme Court handed down a decision against the land monopoly of the corporations, and the decision was sustained by the United States Supreme Court. The problem of the Island is stated in finely chiseled word cameos in the decision of the Puerto Rican Supreme Court: "The existence of large land holdings in a small agricultural country, abnormally overpopulated and without basic industries other than those required for the preparation of agricultural products for the market, is contrary to the economic welfare of its people"; "The end sought by the (500-acre) statute is to protect this small island and its population against monopoly which would end by making them serfs of a huge sugar factory."

The judges who wrote this decision faithfully reflected the feelings of the people, for the new legislature that met in 1941 passed a Land Law which created the Land Authority. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the Land Authority, the redistribution of the land to hungry people, or the proportional benefit farms, or how effective they will be in the rehabilitation of the people of the island. Suffice it to say that the concentration of land since 1898 in the hands of a few sugar corporations has been considered a disservice by the

overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans, as is betokened by their loyal support at the polls in 1944 of the Popular Party, which has initiated agrarian reform. It is certainly not a coincidence that the pre-election battle cry of the victorious party was "Bread, Land, and Liberty." Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place.

However the end of pampering was not yet. Another more recent benefit of United States sovereignty has been bestowed in the shape of Agricultural Adjustment Administration (A.A.A.) subsidies, more than half of which in 1941 went to 97 big growers, who formed less than one per cent of the total number of growers. A.A.A. benefit payments to sugar producers in 1943 totaled $13,122,989.69,[14] but 167 producers, less than 1.23 per cent of the total, received 54 per cent of the entire sum, whereas 88 per cent of all producers received only 16 per cent of the payments. Final figures for the 1944 sugar cane program of the A.A.A. showed a total of authorized payments of $12,214,037.97 to 12,791 growers.[15] Of this, 152 growers received $6,325,997.11 *i.e.*, over half of the total sum of benefit payments, and an average of more than $40,000 per person, or entity. These figures point only too clearly to the conclusion that in spite of the law limiting land holdings by corporations to 500 acres, the validity of which was upheld by the United States Supreme Court in 1942, land concentration continues to exist.

It must not be forgotten that there has never existed in Puerto Rico the tradition of the small owner operator, as it is known in many parts of northwestern Europe and in the United States. But it would surely not be impossible to create a class of owner operators. In the United States such groups evolved out of settlers, many of whom had fled from the system of great landed estates in Europe. In Denmark,

[14] *Forty-fourth Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico*, San Juan, 1944, p. 57.
[15] *Forty-fifth Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico*, San Juan, 1945, p. 58.

in the bloodless revolution during the nineteenth century, peasants became owner operators of small plots on the very estates on which they had lived in virtual serfdom. A cultural environments *can change,* and rapidly—consider the developments in Puerto Rico during the past half century—in the present day it should simply be *manipulated* in order to give more satisfactions to greater numbers of the people of the Island. Technological evolution should not be checked, but rather social science should catch up with it.

As one flies over the beautiful island of Puerto Rico, he can be little aware of the titanic struggles that have been waged by those who dwell on the ground below him: the bright green stalks of the sugar cane wave in the sea breeze and reflect the brilliant tropical sunshine from myriad waxy blades. But even while admiring the enchantment of the scene, one may be aware that this single crop covers very nearly all the fertile alluvial land at the base of the mountains and in the river valleys, and even climbs up the steep slopes of the foothills. Here and there stand small chimneys and gaunt ruined buildings of stone or brick, relics of the family-size sugar mills of the Spanish era, which could not compete with the super-efficient mills of the modern epoch. Once on the ground, on the level fertile sectors of the island, it is even more apparent that "everything is sugar and sugar is everything." Cane grows to the very doors of the little huts of the cane cutters—there is no room for a garden or for the children to play. In the cane districts, the narrow highway is the only space free of cane—upon it, under the very wheels of passing traffic, children play, men have their games of dice or dominoes or sit in groups and talk; many sleep, by day or night, stretched out at full length on the road, not infrequently with fatal results.

If one seeks a picture of present-day life on the coffee *fincas,* it need only be kept in mind that the conditions delineated by Major Ashford forty years ago could not greatly

have improved, in view of the fact that the aggregate income of the coffee growers is from one-fourth to one-eighth of what it was then. In sight of the omnipresent contrasts, it can with difficulty be maintained that the system whereby "a few have all, and all have nought" has been productive of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Living conditions were far from optimal at the time the island passed from Spanish to American hands: wages were low, employment was seasonal, and the working people were poverty-stricken and undernourished.[16] Yet the living conditions of the vast majority of Puerto Ricans seem to have improved little over what they were fifty years ago. Why? A significant item was reported by the U. S. Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs that visited the Island in 1944:

"The acreage formerly cultivated for locally consumed foodstuffs has been changed to cash crops for export thus making Puerto Rico gradually and increasingly dependent upon importation of continental agricultural commodities. . . . Sugar acreage increased seven fold (1899–1939) while food acreage increased only 2 1/6 times in that same period of time."[17]

Meanwhile the population had doubled; in other words, it has kept pace with the increase in food acreage. The increased food acreage, moreover, comprises only plots of the less fertile land, which was all that was available for the purpose. In short, there has been no *per capita* increase in produce for domestic consumption. But the cost of living has undergone an increase many times greater than any increases in wages, because of the fact that foodstuffs must be imported in ever growing proportions from the United States —which is a high price area.

A recent study of sugar prices, made at the Agricultural

[16] Garver and Fincher, "Puerto Rico: Unsolved Problem," Elgin, Ill., 1945, p. 41.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Experiment Station at Río Piedras,[18] concludes that if the sugar industry is to function smoothly enlightened government aid must continue, new markets must be found, and further mechanization must be introduced. Although he warns that technological improvements, if introduced in every phase, would promote efficiency of production but would reduce the volume of employment. Thus the end result is to be an industry ever more and more bounty-oriented, more and more subsidy-conditioned, and increasingly mechanized, producing ever greater numbers of unemployed, who, if government relief is not forthcoming, must starve or emigrate—a monument to government subvention and technological efficiency that looks frighteningly like a gargoyle to the more far-seeing Puerto Ricans.

VII

WHILE THE SUGAR INDUSTRY has been pampered and spoon fed, the coffee industry has been practically neglected. The export crop was sold for $4,000,000 in 1908, the year when the miserable conditions of the workers on the coffee plantations were so vividly decribed by Dr. Ashford. Three decades later, in 1939, the export crop brought half a million dollars. During these years many changes had taken place: gradual mechanization in the sugar industry together with a reduction in the income of the coffee growers brought growing unemployment; hookworm had been partially eradicated and its ravages checked in many areas, which meant not only improved individual health but also—because of the lowered death rate—more human mouths to feed. This new increment in population found but scant opportunities to make a decent living. The higher, steeper mountain slopes afforded no choice farm sites upon which to live—only occasional plots where squatters could settle awhile, share their meagre crops

[18] Jorge J. Serrallés, "Farm Prices and Price Relationships of Sugar and Sugar Cane in Puerto Rico from 1910 to 1945." Río Piedras, 1946, p. 57.

with the landlord, and move on when the soil was eroded away. There could be but one result—migration to the lower-lying areas, both rural and urban; there, without land, without steady work, people vegetated, with a low income in money that was steadily losing purchasing power; for at the same time that the coffee income gradually and relentlessly decreased, the cost of living no less persistently continued to rise. Thus, with more people and fewer jobs, living conditions became progressively worse.

It is surely not a coincidence that those areas that produce raw materials are usually also regions of low incomes, whereas areas that live wholly or in part by the production of manufactured goods, or by the processing of raw materials, are areas of high income. It is difficult enough to raise the economic standards of a region where natural resources and human skill are abundantly available, but it is even more difficult to improve the level where those factors have been neglected for generations. And the coffee growers of Puerto Rico have suffered not only from neglect but also from discrimination—unintentional, perhaps, but none the less real and devastating.

It is, of course, hardly possible to have parallel development in all branches of the economy of any region. But in Puerto Rico we are dealing with the artificial overdevelopment of the sugar industry—by means of bounties, subsidies and tariff preferences—and with its corollary of the laissez faire policy, which resulted in underdevelopment, in the coffee industry.

In the Nineties coffee acreage made up some 40 per cent of the total land under cultivation on the island, and the coffee industry was running, so to speak, on its own power. Since the turn of the century, coffee acreage has decreased somewhat but not materially, whereas, in the forty years following 1899, the sugar acreage increased seven fold. This has allowed little opportunity for a wholsome increase in the acreage devoted to foodstuffs. Moreover, during all that

time the sugar industry was being nurtured on subsidy pap behind the U. S. tariff wall—an extremely good example of the influence of legislation on landscape! A decrease of one cent in the subsidy of two cents per pound at present given to sugar would make the hill lands submarginal for the growing of cane thereby leaving them available for the production of food. In this connection, it is interesting to compare the practice of the Dutch in Java. There every crop of cane is alternated with a food crop for domestic consumption—a practice that is reinforced by law—in order to protect the islanders against usurpation of their land for the use of a single crop.

An anemic, half-starved patient can be gradually restored to health and vigor by the careful administration of food in a properly balanced diet, but the growth of flesh on the skinny frame is a process that cannot be rushed. The decline in the coffee industry having been in process for two generations, it will not be possible to reverse it in a few months. An industry can be expected to recuperate only slowly. But flesh will begin to grow on the gaunt frame of coffee, and healthy corpuscles will form again, under the influence of a proper diet, *i.e.*, a reasonable price fixed in advance.

The loss of population from the relatively healthful highland to the less salubrious lowland fringe of the island, as described above, is indeed unfortunate, for old handicrafts and industries, under favorable circumstances might have been preserved and new ones developed in the mountains of Puerto Rico as has been the case in so many parts of Latin America and Europe. Many Puerto Rican mountaineers, when they migrate, seem to have lost, not only skills, but even their capacity and desire for continuous effort. And skills and values lost by one generation seem to be irretrievably lost. One-time workers on the coffee *fincas,* who have been pushed

off the hills by low wages and miserable living conditions, and who now work as cane cutters during the season or live on relief in the urban slums, will bring up children who will in all likelihood cut cane or live on relief. The social ladder still functions poorly in Puerto Rico (as in most countries of the Western Hemisphere with a Latin background), and children inherit the pattern of life of their parents; the influence of the school and the church is relatively small. What happier evolution could be looked for in a land where "most of the inhabitants still lack the means to feed themselves properly, clothe themselves adequately, house themselves decently, or provide an elementary education for their children or a minimum of security for their old age."[19] Thus the U. S. Tariff Commission paints the picture in March, 1946. Such an environment can do little to create new wants and to teach the skills that will assist in obtaining the means for their satisfaction.

A further source of difficulty arises from the curious effect of the impact of Anglo-Saxon contractual society on the patriarchal culture of Spain. This has resulted in a lack of cultural growth and orientation. Along with a visible increase in research in medicine, vital statistics, agriculture and economics, there has been a falling off in the field of poetry and the old Spanish arts. Familiar idols have been partially cast out and a new set of prejudices and false images has been embraced. Progress has been gained at the cost of a certain disintegration or atrophy of what might be termed the insular personality. In other words, in place of a harmonious fusion, there has developed a kind of island-wide schizophrenia.

After living for considerable periods over a score of years in various of the republics of Latin America, I became convinced that the low standard of living in many of them was

[19] United States Tariff Commission, "The Economy of Puerto Rico," Washington, March, 1946, p. 2.

due, among other factors, to a faulty system of land tenure, to primitive techniques in the production and marketing of food, to inadequate transportation facilities, to minimum propulsions to work due to climatic and social factors, to a low degree of social mobility, to widespread illiteracy, and to conditions of public health inherited, with small improvement, from the Middle Ages. My surprise was therefore great when I found in Puerto Rico—after half a century of American administration and example—the same miserable standards of living for the great mass of the people that characterize so many areas in Latin America. This situation exists although at the same time the great industry that pervades and monopolizes very nearly the whole life and being of the island, has been in many phases streamlined and modernized, thereby contributing no small number of cultural benefits and physical improvements to the general scene. Are we then to conclude that the expansion of this industry has been perhaps excessive, that such all-absorbing concentration has not been conducive to the social and economic health and equilibrium of the people, that this growth upon the body of the island has been proved to be abnormal and malignant?

Although it is frequently maintained that, up to the point of diminishing returns, the plantation system is economically more efficient than the small owner operator system, this contention in the opinion of Dr. Picó, well trained observer and careful scholar, does not hold true in Puerto Rico:

> The need for more than 500 acres per farm for efficiency in production has not been substantiated by facts. In view of the unsocial distribution of income that results from concentration of large tracts of land in the hands of private individuals, the practice of owning more than 500 acres should be condemned.[20]

The owner operator system of land tenure would therefore

[20] Rafael Picó, "Studies in the Economic Geography of Puerto Rico," Río Piedras, 1937, p. 49.

seem to be justified on economic grounds as well as from the point of view of social considerations. The sugar plantation system as evolved in Puerto Rico, particularly during the last half century, has lacked the social stability that usually accompanies owner operatorship—a phenomenon or state of affairs that seems to endow with broad geographic significance the classic statement: *Latifundia perdidere Italiam.* This system, in spite of its economic efficiency in production, has everywhere in the world been unable to escape labor troubles. Hostility, engendered by the friction between landed and landless, flares up frequently in strikes and revolts, modern versions of the bitter agrarian struggles so familiar to students of the rise and fall of societies around the Mediterranean.

Farming in large units may indeed permit of huge *economic* returns, which have, however, not infrequently been overbalanced by the low *social* gains. Unless profits are increasingly prorated on a fair percentage basis among capital, labor and management, it may still hold true that,

> Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
> Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.
> Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
> A breath can make them, as a breath has made:
> But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
> When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

Tradition is strong and memories are long. Coffee growers still have considerable acreage against the time when there will be a steady market for their product, as in the "good old days" of the last half of the nineteenth century. For their part, the sugar interests of Puerto Rico still dream in terms of the great fortunes made from sugar in the Antilles a century or two ago, rather than face the reality, that the island cannot, unless favored by the U. S. tariff preference, compete in the production of sugar with other areas that have the advantages of more fertile soil, cheaper labor, greater mechanization,

more accessible markets. Yet the American sugar baby in Puerto Rico, fat, dropsical, and spooned, still sits in a high chair, although nearly fifty years old, and has not learned to go it alone. Nothing is done to change the regime for this hopeless cripple. "To follow foolish precedent, and to wink with both our eyes is easier than to think."

III

The Struggle of the Landless Proletariat Against the Sugar Monopoly

VIII

To RECAPITULATE, the rapid development of the coffee industry during the nineteenth century was paralleled by the decline in the production of sugar, for various reasons: capital and credit were scarce, agricultural techniques were not improved, disease decreased the yields, slave labor was inefficient, and for some years after the abolition of slavery cheap free labor was hard to obtain, and the transportation net was very poor. In other words, after three hundred years of emphasis and aid directed toward the sugar industry, sugar was outstripped by the newcomer, coffee. American control of the island, after 1898, saw the beginning of the concentration of land in the hands of sugar growers, who profited from the American tariff system. Since the United States tariff was designed to protect from foreign competition products grown or manufactured on the mainland, sugar and tobacco, produced in Puerto Rico as well as in the United States, benefited from the tariff. Coffee, not produced on the mainland, did not receive tariff protection. Thus the gradual decline of the coffee industry has been concomitant with the process of concentration of land in the hands of the sugar growers and with the emphasis on monoculture.

But even at present, when the outlook for the coffee industry is still gloomy, there is a large acreage planted to that crop. Since coffee raising has traditionally, and of necessity,

been in the hands of relatively small independent farmers, protection would have meant more money in the pockets not only of the growers but of the workers too, with consequent improvement upon the cultural landscape. The tobacco growers—also relatively small independent farmers, whose industry has always enjoyed protection, have made of the tobacco growing areas the most prosperous and most smiling agricultural sectors of the island. Therefore it would appear to be going somewhat far afield to blame hurricanes, loss of the Spanish market, erosion, diminishing yields, and so forth, for the gradual decline of the coffee industry, when the real cause has been the lack of assurance, since 1898, of a fair price per pound for every pound of Puerto Rican coffee produced.

Thus, the same island on which coffee was the chief export crop in the nineties, fifty years later was forced to import coffee to meet the domestic demands, whereas sugar plantations that were being converted into cattle ranches at the time of the American Intervention, soon became profitable as sugar producers again, under the preferential tariff. But the monopoly of land grew so overwhelming in this bonanza industry that the great mass of the people were filled with a despairing sense of injustice and frustration, ready to follow any leader that promised speedy relief. It was not a question of the more abundant life, but a problem of sheerest animal survival, and the island-wide dissatisfaction engendered in the struggle supplied the major impetus to the enforcement of the 500 acre law against the corporations.

In the war against Spain in 1898 the United States occupied Cuba and Puerto Rico. Soon after the war Cuba was granted her sovereignty and became an autonomous republic. Puerto Rico, for strategic purposes, continued to be held by the United States with the political status, since 1900, of a U. S.

Possession. But economically the island was always an integral part of the United States. Capital from the mainland made itself at home on the island, particularly in the sugar business. There was an emphasis on cane to the neglect of coffee. The profits from cane were in large part siphoned off to the states instead of being ploughed back into the island. The three largest absentee companies left in Puerto Rico only one-fourth of their profits of $81,000,000 in the 1920–1935 period.[21]

There is a crying need for higher capital investment, rationalization, and complete technical re-equipment in every phase of activity on the island, save in the sugar industry alone. But withal the modern technological processes that have been introduced into the sugar mill, the landless day laborer in the cane field remains in the hoe and oxcart and machete stage of development, and he is paid according to the standards of pre-industrial society. The high-salaried sugar chemist in the mill sits in the rarefied atmosphere of economic Olympian heights, far removed from the low-wage cane cutter grubbing away in the stifling humid air on the earth below; for the vigilance of the chemist saves the company his yearly salary many times over, but the efficiency of a man with a hoe and a machete merits only the poorest remuneration. Although it may well be true that the cash income from a single acre planted in cane is equal to the income that could be derived from as many as four to twelve acres planted in food crops, nevertheless the advantage is of little practical benefit to the mass of poorly nourished Puerto Ricans, who have little share in the sugar income. If mechanization is introduced all along the line, and if workers are freed from endemic diseases and are enabled to obtain a balanced diet, per capita production for those employed will increase and

[21] Clarence Senior, "Self-Determination for Puerto Rico," New York, 1946, p. 12.

wages can rise; more food and social services can be purchased, island-wide production and well-being will increase in an upward spiral. How can the worker get a better diet, which would help step up efficiency? They must either grow more food or import more; since sugar has preëmpted most of the good land on which the growing of foodstuffs would have been possible, it would seem logical and necessary to import more food. But how can Puerto Rican workers continue, with their present miserable wages, to buy food in the market of continental United States, in competition with workers earning five to ten times as much? Yet as long as the sugar interests can survive only behind the U.S. tariff wall, so surely will the Puerto Rican laborer be forced to pay American prices for consumers' goods, instead of bidding freely on the world market for cheaper produce. Thanks to these restrictions, some $5,000,000 per year is added to the cost of rice, mainstay of the Puerto Rican diet, and from 10 to 35 per cent is added to the cost of shoes, which are an essential in tropical Puerto Rico to the prevention and control of hookworm. To be sure, some students of the situation maintain that the benefits of the sugar tariff far outweigh the added costs of the imported necessities. Be that as it may, it is still apparent to even the most casual observer that Puerto Rican workers have been ground extremely fine between the upper and the nether millstones, that is, between metropolitan industrial prices and colonial preindustrial wages. Confronted with this impasse, a substantial number of Puerto Rican leaders have lost the belief in the capacity of the sugar industry to regulate itself.

Muñoz Marín, brilliant writer and speaker, and the ablest political thinker in the Caribbean, together with Rexford Tugwell, Governor and conscientious student of the Island's problems, worked together in organizing a Development

Bank and an Agricultural Development Company, with the hope that thereby would be provided the new capital and the new techniques that hitherto, under the long regime of government subvention to sugar, masquerading as laissez-faire, has failed to be forthcoming. These leaders have at last, in the words of Carlyle, "articulated the dumb, deep want of the people", and in response an aroused insular government is backing hydro-electric development and vocational education, industrial expansion and the redistribution of land. These undertakings will inevitably affect the lot of the long-forgotten man in Puerto Rico.

The close of the war brought far-reaching economic consequences for Puerto Rico; pay checks to the home folks from those in the service dwindled and ceased, the fifty-two-twenty clubs lost numbers and rum revenues will decrease as soon as whiskey is again distilled in the States. Appropriations for military and federal construction on the island are already smaller. The New Deal was swept into the dustbin by the voters in the United States in the November, 1946, elections. Is it ended for Puerto Rico? Does the end of the New Deal in the United States mean that the Good Neighbor Policy is over too, or is it perhaps in any case not necessary to be neighborly with members of our own political family? *Is* Puerto Rico a member? Perhaps the Republicans will want to get back to normalcy: will they consider it normal to ask their constituents to pay two or three cents more a pound for Puerto Rican sugar than they would have to pay for Cuban sugar if it came in tariff-free? Perhaps both the constituents and the Cubans will have ideas on normalcy. Will the United States graciously grant Puerto Rico independence—immediate or gradual—as it did the Philippines, now that we can grow a lot of our own sugar behind our tariff wall—and import the remainder more cheaply from

non-U.S. possessions? Will Washington want to continue pumping tens of millions of federal dollars into Puerto Rico each year? But can official Washington ever afford to siphon off the reservoir of good will built up on the island by Franklin Roosevelt, who was loved by the great mass of Puerto Ricans as they loved no other continental American? Can any party in power in Washington afford *not* to solve the Puerto Rican problem by indefinitely adjourning the day when the entire population, enlightened by a prolonged educational campaign in the movies, over the radio and in the press, may hold a plebiscite, and thus democratically determine their political status?

As far as the Puerto Ricans are concerned, it would seem that the key to the question of political status is held by Muñoz Marín, so long as he retains his present hold. The common people generally are in a good bargaining position when they are led by a man of the calibre of Muñoz Marín, wise in the ways of men, whole-hearted in his struggle to obtain better living conditions for his people, sincerely indifferent to the traditional opportunities for enriching himself in office—this scion of a great patriot and idealist comes naturally by his clear vision and his unshakeable belief in the dignity of every human being. Under his guidance, the ballot in the hands of the landless has proved a powerful weapon.

The sugar industry—which Muñoz Marín is reported to have compared to a cow, fed by the Government and milked by the big corporations—long made huge profits for a small number, but such a state of affairs could not continue forever, for it was the very system of monopoly of the land for the use of a single crop that created the landless proletariat, and therewith planted the seeds of its own destruction.

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